

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM APPROVAL AUDIT VISIT

SUMMARY REPORT

FRANKLIN/HILL SCHOOL DISTRICT, SAU#18

Special Education Director: JoEllen Divoll

Superintendent of Schools: Christine Tyrie

Date of Audit Visit: June 7, 2000

Visiting Team Members: Maryclare Heffernan, Chairperson
Brian Blake, Special Education Director, SAU 61
Robert Cray-Andrews, Dir. of Special Education Programs, Notre Dame College
Tom Donahue, Assistant Principal, SAU 4
Kathy Fagan, Special Education Director, SAU 59
Mary Ford, Assistant Director, NHDOE SIP/SIG Grant Coordinator
Paulene Laliberte, Special Educator
Jane Murray, Special Educator, SAU 27
Dina Trinello, Director NHDOE SIP/SIG Grant Coordinator

SAU 18 Team Members: Paul Smith Elementary School
Jackie Bergeron, Guidance Counselor
LeeAnn Michelin, Speech Pathologist
Robin Scott, Preschool Teacher

Bessie Rowell Elementary School
Marge Edwards, Teacher
Beth Farmer, Special Education Teacher
Martha Raymond, Guidance Counselor
Jennie D. Blake Elementary School
Deb Gendron, Principal
Deb O'Connor, Special Education Teacher

Franklin Middle School
Veronica Barbadoro, Guidance Counselor
Heather Beach, Teacher
Cari Williams, Special Education Teacher

Franklin High School
Heidi Hardwick, Special Education Teacher
Cindy Skarsten, Guidance Counselor
Joyce Soucy, Teacher

James O and Out of District File Review
Margaret Edgecomb, Special Education Teacher

INTRODUCTION

A New Hampshire Department of Education Special Education Audit Visit was conducted in SAU 18 on June 7, 2000. The visit, using a case study format that involved both external and in house team members, was the culminating activity for the 1999-2000 school year during which issues of special education noncompliance were addressed. This is the second year of a conditional approval.

Administration and staff throughout SAU 18 have shown a willingness to work toward improvement in all previously identified areas of concern. There have been numerous changes in special education process, as well as ongoing professional development offered to all staff. The special education forms have been revised and staff have received training related to the various aspects of all procedures. The Director of Special Education, along with other administrators and staff, has worked to make specific program improvements for students, to plan for the future and to provide support and open communication to staff.

Staffing patterns have been improved during the course of the two years and the result of several new instructional and administrative positions are already having a positive impact. The high school building is being extensively renovated to provide all students with comfortable and appropriate learning spaces. There is a plan to improve the technology throughout the district and with increased Internet access.

As in any public school district, there are ongoing areas in need of improvement. The continued efforts of the general and special education staff toward more collaborative programming will continued to be addressed. The connection of the NH Curriculum Frameworks to the general curriculum and then to the development of IEP's is another area that will require attention. These links will provide a natural access of the general curriculum for students with disabilities. The results in student outcome should be evidenced by improved performance with the NHEIAP assessment.

In general, the spirit of willingness to make improvements and plan for the future, among the SAU 18 special education and other staff, has been impressive. The case study format used for this audit visit was in part a result of the wish of the staff to be kept fully informed and involved and to be able to make suggestions for future improvements.

THE CASE STUDY MODEL AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

SAU 18 administration, in planning for the audit visit, suggested the use of a nontraditional case study format to narrow the focus and provide a more in-depth view of the programming in district. The audit team was developed for each school to include building level staff such as a special educator, a general educator and a related services staff member as well as one or two external team members. The team members were provided with a case study template and offered an orientation to the process the morning of the visit. A random selection of student records had taken place in advance of the visit so that a cross section of programming, disabilities, age and gender would be represented. All records and other relevant materials were gathered in preparation of the audit visit.

The team members were asked to consider the two following Guiding Questions:

- 1) How effective are transitions for students as they move from school to school within SAU 18?
- 2) How was the determination of the student's disability determined by the evaluation team and was the process effective?

The teams reported that they found this in-depth view of the student record and programming to be an interesting and helpful method of program review. It provided a close look not only at the student's identification, programming, progress and related issues, but also at the district's educational system as a whole.

COMMENDATIONS

- All staff implementing IEP's do an excellent job of recording quarterly attainment of IEP objectives.
- The preschool classroom includes a computer for student use which students access frequently.
- The preschool classroom presently includes typical children in the program.
- The individual teaching assistant assigned to the student reviewed enhances the student's success in the program.
- Teachers are required to link daily lesson plans to the NH State Frameworks.
- The program offers clear evidence of good transition from Early Intervention to Preschool program.
- The Preschool staff does an exemplary job of overall programming.

SCHOOL SUMMARY

The team, composed of a visiting team member and several Paul Smith Preschool staff, found strong evidence in the case study that current programming practices are sound and effective. Following a thorough review of the student's special education record and other relevant school information, they determined that the preschool team made good use of the Early Intervention Assessments and Individual Family Service Plan to provide a smooth transition from the Early Intervention to the Paul Smith Preschool program. They also noted that the current identification of Developmental Delay is appropriate for this student's complex needs, but that the evaluation team may be challenged to develop an appropriate identification once he reaches the age limit for that particular identification.

The team found that the Preschool staff do a very good job of developing appropriate IEP's with clearly measurable objectives that hold the student to high, yet reasonable, expectations in all areas.

The team noted that the Paul Smith School is commended for connecting the curriculum of all grade levels to the NH Curriculum Frameworks. They also noted that the preschoolers have access to a classroom computer and that it is well utilized.

The team was impressed with the present program that is inclusive by design and allows for the modeling of speech and language, play and motor, social and cognitive experiences for all of the students. However, they expressed a great degree of concern regarding the planned fall 2000 transfer of the Preschool Program to the Bessie Rowell School. The move, necessitated by a lack of space in the district, will eliminate the opportunity to include typical preschoolers in the program and will place the program in a grade three through five school. The lack of access to same age peers is seen by the team as representing a significant loss to the Preschool program. They further note that the concern is specific to the case study reviewed and that there is evidence that the student is benefiting from the inclusionary setting.

SUGGESTIONS

- Consider all possibilities for the continued provision of preschool programming that includes typical students as well as students with disabilities.
- Transition planning from preschool to kindergarten should also be carefully considered in the event that the preschool is moved to the Rowell School as the students may greater support as they move from one setting to another.

CITATIONS:

There are no citations at this time.

Bessie Rowell Elementary School

COMMENDATIONS:

- There is common planning time available for grade level teams.
- There is a nurturing staff who care about students and their success.
- Working with limited resources, teachers provide many additional classroom materials. The school and classrooms are decorated with student class work and projects.
- A positive staff doesn't settle for mediocrity.
- Class sizes are manageable.
- Communication from building to building, particularly related to special education issues is commended.

SCHOOL SUMMARY

The visiting team comprised of two external team members and three Bessie Rowell staff members, were able to use the case study model to identify areas of strength within the school as well as several areas in need of improvement. They found that the student whose record and program they reviewed was enjoying his school experience although had experienced little progress in any academic gain. They also found that his IEP goals and objectives were essentially the same over a period of years and recommend a review of this aspect of the IEP process so that student plans are reflective of changing educational needs. They also identified a lack of connection between informative medical information and the academic record, where there was no indication of any knowledge of the child's early medical condition. They suggested that relevant medical information be included in the team's work and that, in such cases, the school nurse be a part of the special education team. They also found that this child had experienced a number of moves from different towns and that the transition from school to school proved difficult for him.

The team reported that the Bessie Rowell School overall has manageable class sizes, providing opportunities for staff to work closely with students. They found that the school staff are committed to their work and significantly enhance their classrooms and instructional work with materials they purchase or make on their own. They commended the common planning time that is available to grade level teams of teachers but suggest that more collaboration could occur regarding interdisciplinary instruction or other curriculum components.

The school is to be fully wired for Internet access this summer and that should greatly assist in extending the resources for students, as there seems to be a lack of technology seen in classroom instruction. The building itself is in need of refurbishing, specifically the worn floor tiles.

SUGGESTIONS

- Develop clearer transition planning for students as they move from grade to grade and school to school. This is particularly important for students who may have experienced a number of moves from town to town and lack a consistency in their educational experience.
- Work with a district team to create consistent curriculum throughout the district. Curriculum should be clearly aligned to the NH Frameworks.
- Consider budget proposal that would provide adequate amount of funding for classroom supplies and materials so that teachers would not have to assume such a great responsibility for supplying materials.
- Create a system to ensure that all relevant medical information is a part of the special education process and that the school nurse is included in relevant team decisions.
- The school programs rely heavily on the availability of federal funds. The team suggests that the district consider the use of local funds to support essential programs so that future programming is secure.

CITATIONS:

Ed# 1109.05 (3) IEP does not reflect the evidence that the student's progress was monitored regarding the appropriateness of the program based on the progress of the student.

Jennie D. Blake Elementary School

COMMENDATIONS:

- There is a very positive learning environment in the school with excellent communication evident among staff and students.
- The modeling and teaching of RESECT & RESPONSIBILTY as the school theme is commended.
- There is an outstanding accommodation of student learning needs evident.
- The Principal exhibits a “can do” attitude in addressing space needs; student needs; and staff needs.
- Staff is very flexible and willing to work out cooperative scheduling.
- Students are offered clear guidelines around making good choices and good decisions.
- The school offers a strong inclusionary program for all students.

SCHOOL SUMMARY:

The case study team at the Jennie D. Blake School found a school building that is extremely overcrowded, over utilized and inaccessible. They expressed concerns regarding the ability to safely and quickly evacuate the school in the event of an emergency, particularly for students and staff working in the basement areas of the building where access could be easily blocked. They also expressed concern over the general quality of the building's interior, including air quality and the condition of some of the building features, such as the downstairs carpeting. They further found the instructional spaces, particularly the special education area, to be too small, and in some situations, without access to a computer. There is no private space for staff to hold confidential telephone conversations with parents or school consultants. There is also no common space for staff to have lunch, prepare lessons, or plan cooperatively. It was also noted that the building is not handicapped accessible and could not safely house students or adults with physical/and or significant cognitive limitations.

The school does not have an adequate library/media center and students must rely on access to the town library as often as possible. The use of computer technology in the classroom has improved this year due to the successful grant writing skill of a staff member. However, students at the Jennie D. Blake School should have adequate use of current software programs, as well as up to date computers.

The school staff are highly commended for their spirit and willingness to go above and beyond in providing quality instruction to the community's students. The building principal sets high standards, has worked hard with the staff to connect the NH Curriculum Frameworks to the daily instruction and to successful outcomes for students. She brings a clear vision to the school community and the energy to implement continuous improvements. The school staff are credited with creating positive programming in the classroom spaces, and in every nook and cranny available. The staff are commended for their communication and cooperation with each other. Of note is the highly respectful behavior of the students toward staff, other students and visitors. The development of this culture of a respectful, yet enthusiastic learning environment at the Jennie D. Blake School is to be highly commended.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Continue the planning with the Franklin Middle School staff to assist the Jennie D. Blake students in making smooth transitions to the Middle School programs.
- Share practices related to the alignment of curriculum to the NH Curriculum Frameworks with other schools in the district in order to improve the consistency of curriculum throughout the district and to assist in student transitions.
- Create a long range technology improvement plan that is consistent with the technology planning throughout the district.
- Continue to work with staff at the Middle School toward the ongoing improvement of transition issues as students move from the Jennie D. Blake School to the Franklin Middle School.

Jennie D. Blake Elementary School, Continued

CITATIONS:

Ed. #1119.06(b)(d) Facilities and Location – The classrooms and other instructional areas presently being used for students with educational disabilities are not comparable to physical space for other instructional programs, nor is the space large enough to accommodate equipment necessary to implement the students' individualized education programs and provide for all other learning activities. Further, concern regarding the health and safety of staff and students housed in this overcrowded school is noted.

Ed. #1119.04 (a) Equipment, Materials and Assistive Technology – The school's library/media center does not adequately provide the technology and print/audio materials necessary to fully implement educational programming for students with disabilities.

COMMENDATIONS:

- The visiting team notes an improvement in staff morale and attitude from the previous visit of one year ago.
- The staff are caring and appear to be interested in working together to make program improvements.
- The communication among the special education department staff is improved and has shown results in a more consistent and complete special education process.
- The staff at the Middle School commend the efforts made by the district Special Education Director to be visible and available to support and consult with the team.
- The improved staffing patterns, and acquisition of certified special education staff has been helpful.
- There is very adequate space available for special education programming.
- The IEP development process has been improved and appears to be effective.
- Continue to work on an effective transition process for students moving to the high school level.

SCHOOL SUMMARY:

The case study Team at the Middle School found very adequate space available for student programming. They describe a caring and interested staff who express a willingness to work together to create improved programming for students. A returning team member, who participated on the visit a year ago, found a positive change in overall attitude and morale.

The team also noted that, while there is a clear continuum of services available to students, there appears to be a high number of students who are working in self-contained or in resource room programs. The IDEA guidelines for students with disabilities are clear in requiring that students have access to the general curriculum and this team questioned the direction the special education programming may be taking by creating pull-out programs. They suggest that the general and special education staff and administration work together to review the amount of time students are separated from the classrooms and consider methods that may be effective in creating more inclusive programming.

Procedural issues that had been previously significant have been corrected, for the most part. The ongoing professional development offered to the special education staff, along with the revised forms, has helped to provide consistency in special education process.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Monitor the number of self-contained and pull out special education programs to ensure that students are included in regular classrooms.
- Continue to provide a smooth transition to the new special education forms by setting a date for complete transfer to the new forms.
- Review the identification process used in determining special education disability. The student's case study reviewed could have been identified as a student with 504 needs instead of special education disability. Training and clear guidelines will help staff in this process.

CITATIONS:

Ed. #1119.01 IEP Components - In the student record reviewed there were several components missing from the IEP, including signatures on the IEP and a student profile.

COMMENDATIONS:

- In the case study reviewed, the visiting team was able to identify that the parents, student, guidance counselor, teachers and administrators worked collaboratively to create solutions for student issues as they arose.
- The school staff are commended for their enthusiasm and interest in working toward student success and for working together to provide the necessary instructional components.
- The improvements to the high school facility are significant and will provide more effective learning spaces for students.
- The new IEP format will allow for better documentation of student programs (measurable goals and benchmarked objectives) and improved evidence of progress.
- The programs at the high school allow for access to the regular instruction and curriculum for students with educational disabilities.

SCHOOL SUMMARY:

The case study team at the Franklin High School had the opportunity to meet with the student whose record they were reviewing. The student expressed a great degree of satisfaction in the programming he has received while at Franklin High School. He said he's learned to advocate for himself and attends his IEP meetings as a full participating member. He described his specific reading weaknesses and the efforts made by the school staff to provide him with a reading program designed to meet his needs. He also described a decreasing reliance on special education services as he moved from grade to grade and an increased sense of confidence in his abilities. He attributed the success of his high school program, in part, to caring teachers and supportive parents.

The team was able to see evidence of the transition from the old special education process and documentation to the new and commend the school staff for their work together in improving the process. They suggest that the new IEP format will provide a clearer way for staff to set and measure goal for student outcomes.

The team also identified areas in need of attention. They found that the goal and objectives written for the student while at the high school were very general and that they did not, in fact, represent some of the specific programming offered to this student. They were also not able to see a link between the IEP and the NH Frameworks or the high school curriculum in general. They also found that while the student participated in the 10th grade NHEIAP assessment there were no accommodations made for this student with significant reading disability.

The team also commented on the positive improvements made to the physical facility. The classrooms that have been renovated are attractive and comfortable learning spaces, compared to the areas yet to be renovated. They did note a lack of upkeep in the high school and suggest that all efforts be made to maintain the condition of the school.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Assist staff in creating an IEP process that works with the general educators to more clearly align the IEP goals and benchmark objectives to the curriculum and that more fully reflects the comprehensive programming offered to students.
- Improve the connection of computer literacy and computer skills as they relate to the student's career preparation in the IEP.
- Continue professional development for staff to assist in the transition of the special education process and forms.

CITATIONS:

None at this time.

James O. Monitoring Program

The student file reviewed for the James O. Monitoring revealed all aspects of the process and student paperwork to be in place with no citations.